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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000896

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S BRIEFING ON THE  
NIGER DELTA

REF: ABUJA 310

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On May 22, Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe summoned the members of Abuja's diplomatic corps on short notice for a briefing on the latest concerning the violence in the Niger Delta. FonMin opened his briefing with a history of the Delta's troubles, giving statistics for various categories of crime and oil infrastructure vandalism. He then went on to assure assembled diplomats that while the Federal Government could not "sit back with its arms folded at watch its personnel be slaughtered," the Joint Task Force (JTF) was making every effort to ensure minimal civilian casualties. Maduekwe was followed by a number of Niger Delta region state governors or their deputies, who as a body generally gave updates on development efforts in their states, expressed appreciation for the creation of the Niger Delta Ministry, and blamed international oil companies (IOCs) and foreigners for buying bunkered oil and importing small arms into the region. Niger Delta Minister Ufot Ekaette gave a brief update on the activities of his Ministry, and promised to revive the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS) meetings. Finally, a Q&A time was led by Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Minister of State Bagudu Hirse, which was uneventful except for his assertion that Nigerian politicians themselves were to blame for the creation of the militant/criminal gangs. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On May 22, FonMin Maduekwe summoned the members of Abuja's diplomatic corps to a local hotel for a briefing on the latest events in the Niger Delta. He began by saying the Niger Delta was his greatest foreign policy challenge, as wherever he travels, it is the first thing he is asked about by his foreign interlocutors. He then gave a brief history of the problems in the Niger Delta, saying that what began as a struggle against injustice has now degenerated into outright criminality, and gave a series of kidnapping, murder, oil bunkering, and oil production equipment vandalism statistics to prove his point. Repeating a phrase commonly used by Nigerian officials to rationalize the current JTF operations in Delta state, he said that no responsible

government "would sit back with its arms folded, while its personnel were being slaughtered." He said that while the Federal Government was making every effort to limit civilian casualties, some "collateral damage" was unavoidable, and the GON was providing humanitarian relief. He assured his listeners that the Federal Government was not engaged in civil war, that there had been no nationwide plan to impoverish or oppress Niger Deltans, and pleaded for foreign diplomats to send back "fair" reports to their governments. Maduekwe added that the MFA would be arranging a visit to the Delta for COMs within the next several weeks. Finally, he said that the Niger Delta Ministry was the most viable platform for "fast-tracking" the GON's development efforts, and that progress was being made to harmonize the working relationship between the Ministry and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.

¶3. (SBU) Maduekwe was followed by governors and deputy governors from Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, and Ondo states, who for the most part gave updates highlighting their efforts to develop their states, blamed foreigners and IOCs for the Delta's bunkering and small arms problems, and asserted that six Niger Delta regional states (the South-South zone, in Nigerian parlance) were sound places for foreign investment. Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi's speech was the longest, as he gave a feisty defense of his own tenure in office and a reproach to Maduekwe, repeatedly accusing the rest of Nigeria of taking the Delta's oil, ruining its inhabitants' opportunities for life and employment, and then being surprised when desperate people took up arms. He also accused the Federal Government of hypocrisy and a lack of commitment to the rule of law, saying that at the same time that it issued a warrant for the arrest of "militant" leader Ateke Tom, he was enjoying police

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protection and escorts on his travels. Other speakers included Niger Delta Minister Ufot Ekaette, who said the establishment of his ministry was proof of the GON's seriousness in ending Delta strife, and who promised to revive the GGESS meetings; and MFA Minister of State Bagudu Hirse, who said that the issue everyone knew about but did not mention was the fact that it was Niger Delta politicians themselves who originally created the region's armed gangs in the first place (at this point Bayelsa State Governor Timipre Sylva remarked to DCM and Poloff that "he (Hirse) doesn't know what he's talking about" and briefly walked out). The only question asked during what was supposed to be the Q&A time concerned the GON's plans for oil platform security, and when given the chance to answer, Ekaette simply remained mute until Hirse asked a governor to try to answer.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The whole event lasted nearly three hours, and had a bizarre, stage-managed quality to it -- and not just because the room was already set up for a wedding to take place later, and the press was present, filming the entire briefing. It had a very thrown-together feel, and given how little, if any, new information was given to Abuja's diplomats, perhaps what was NOT said was most important. Maduekwe did not provide any meaningful updates as to what was actually happening in the Delta, what the JTF's plan is there, what humanitarian provision if any had been made for those fleeing the fighting, and in all the talk about development, no serious mention was made about fighting corruption or plans for development in the face of drastically reduced foreign earning from petroleum. Ekaette, who per refTel was apparently unaware of the existence of the GGESS after several months in his position, still could not get it right, calling it the "Gulf of Guinea Energy Survey Strategy" after a long pause in his speech. The most pressing questions about the latest spasm of Delta violence are "why now? and to what end?" and today's tedious briefing brought us no closer to answering them. END COMMENT.

¶5. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS